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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Sacramento Covered helps mother get health care for her son

BY SUKHI BRAR

Rosio Guzman, a single mother, was working two jobs, but neither job provided health care coverage for her or her son. This was a problem because every winter Guzman's son suffered from a debilitating cough and required special breathing treatments from a doctor. Without coverage, Guzman was paying for her son's health care out-of-pocket. It was a stressful time.

"It was really expensive. I had to borrow money, but I paid it all back," Guzman says.

Seeing her financial struggle, Guzman's doctor mentioned that she could apply for the Healthy Families program. "I applied for Healthy Families, so my son could have insurance," Guzman says. At the time, she was making enough money to qualify for the Healthy Families program by working two jobs — one temporary job and another as a waitress.

[SACRAMENTO COVERED] WAS VERY HELPFUL BECAUSE I WAS VERY STRESSED OUT ... I AM SO THANKFUL.

—Rosio Guzman

"The first time around I applied on my own. I did not have to fill out much, but fax a little information because Medi-Cal faxed information to them for me," Guzman explains. But when Guzman's temporary job ended, she was again left without coverage for her son because she fell below the required income level to qualify for coverage and the

Healthy Families program was transitioned into Medi-Cal managed care plans.

"I knew I was not going to be covered with Healthy Families anymore. They told me I would have to apply to Medi-Cal again," Guzman says. "I went on my own and I applied for Medi-Cal and it was a big hassle."

Every time she called to check on the status of her application, she was given a new date for when her coverage would become effective. Then, all of a sudden, Guzman was told her son's insurance would be terminated altogether. "They kept pushing me off. I called every couple weeks. Finally, they said, 'No, you are not going to have insurance,'" Guzman says.

Guzman went to the welfare office seeking help and they asked her to call Sacramento Covered, formerly known as Cover the Kids. The local organization is a broad coalition of key representatives from local hospitals, county health service agencies, community clinics, faith-based community organizations, educational institutions, funding institutions and businesses that work to ensure that all children and their families have access to health care services. The organization is sponsored by a Building Healthy Communities grant from The California Endowment.

"Carmen Herrera answered my call and she assisted me ... to get my son covered," Guzman explains.

Fortunately, Guzman was hired for a new job and was able to qualify for coverage for her son again thanks to Sacramento Covered. Herrera helped her fill out all of the information and guided her through the

process step by step.

"It was very helpful because I was very stressed out. It was frustrating for me. If it wasn't for [Sacramento Covered], I probably would still be getting the run around. I am so thankful for [Sacramento Covered]."



BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.

HEALTHCARE FOR ALL CHILDREN

Sacramento Covered believes that all children deserve access to affordable healthcare coverage, no matter what their family income may be. In Sacramento County alone, approximately 16,000 children ages 0 to 18 do not have health coverage. About two-thirds of these children are eligible for current subsidized programs, such as Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. Sacramento Covered staff can help families complete the necessary steps to receive any and all health benefits available to them. Citizenship is not required for some health programs and Sacramento Covered has a multilingual staff on hand to assist.

Lorena Sanchez, an employee of Sacramento Covered, helps applicants find health coverage for their children. The program is funded by the Building Healthy Communities Grant of The California Endowment.

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Giving Youth a Voice

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Marisol Yanez knows making a positive impact on a youth can have a tremendous effect on their future. As the Youth Leadership Coordinator for the Youth Voice program at La Familia, she works especially hard to give at-risk youth in South Sacramento a place to be able to express themselves and plan out their futures. The comprehensive counseling, support and outreach organization is sponsored by the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment — a 10-year plan to improve 14 underserved communities across California.

“WHEN I JOINED THE PROGRAM, I WAS EXTREMELY SHY AND UNCOMFORTABLE WHEN I [SPOKE] TO OTHERS ... THE YOUTH VOICE PROGRAM HAS IMPROVED MY LEADERSHIP, SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS.”

The Youth Voice program provides young people between the ages of 14 and 21 the opportunity to take part in community projects, have a creative space to express themselves and communicate with each other and take on leadership roles to increase their confidence and experience. Yanez says often, teens she has worked with in South Sacramento say they feel ignored by their peers, teachers and parents. Yanez believes the program gives them a place to be themselves and say what’s on their mind. It also helps them improve their self-esteem and gives them a chance to improve

their community through projects the group decides to take on. Currently, the group is working on putting on a performance of the musical “Let the Eagle Fly.” The musical is about the life of labor leader Cesar Chavez and his ten core values.

“It only takes one person to make a change in someone’s life,” Yanez says. “I feel like, as an organization, if we can help them make that change and succeed, that we’ve done a pretty good job at making sure they’ve accomplished what they wanted to accomplish.”

Executive Director Rachel Rios says part of the program is also aimed at reducing youth violence and having a safe place where youth can express themselves is important to helping achieve that goal. Sixteen-year-old Mimi Wong says she has become more confident after getting involved with the program in 2010.

“Everyone should be able to express themselves freely within limits,” Wong says. “However, school somewhat alters that experience. Students like me may feel afraid to speak out or feel insecure. At the Youth Voice Program, leaders want youth to speak out.”

Mimi adds being involved with the program has her excited about her future. She’s already planning out college and hopes to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in biology.

“When I joined the program, I was extremely shy and uncomfortable when I [spoke] to others,” Wong says. “I also didn’t like to express my opinions as I thought others would judge me or [I would] be ashamed if I was wrong. Over the three years, I have broken out of my shell and become less shy and nervous. ... The Youth Voice program has improved my leadership, social and communication skills.”



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THE YOUTH VOICE PROGRAM

The Youth Voice program gives at-risk youth in South Sacramento a safe place where they can express themselves and learn valuable skills they can use in the future. The comprehensive counseling, support and outreach organization is sponsored by the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment.

Youth Leadership Coordinator Marisol Yanez and Mimi Wong.



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Boys and Men of Color Network Helps Change Lives

BY NATASHA VON KAENEL

When Gabriel Brower was born in 1995, there was no baby blue bedroom waiting for him.

But that has only made him stronger. “Look at where I come from. Not too many people are making something for themselves, why be the same? I am always that person who wants to be different.” To stay strong, he thinks not of himself, but who he is influencing. While technically he only has two biological siblings, after living in six different homes around the Sacramento area there are many more people that look to him as their brother. “Monkey see, monkey do when it comes to brothers and sisters. If they see you succeed, they are going to want to succeed.”

“THIS IS A POWERFUL MOVEMENT. WE ARE DOING BIG THINGS, INFLUENCING LIVES AND CHANGING THEM FOR THE BETTER. IT’S JUST GREAT.”

He learned of the Boys and Men of Color Network in Sacramento in March of 2011. The network has helped him gain necessary speaking skills and tools for raising awareness and stirring up political pressure supporting the youth community in Sacramento. But more importantly, it has brought them together. “We aren’t all from the same schools, but when we come together, we all talk, have fun, make fun of stuff, just laugh and have good conversations. You know, it’s good.”

Gabriel and other youth activists from the Sacramento branch held a video rally on zero tolerance policies with youth in Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Fresno in August 2011. In July 2012, Gabriel attended the Boys and Men of Color Network Summit at UC Davis.

At the summit, Gabriel remembers that a gang prevention counselor spoke of his experience growing up in the hood. His older brother had fell into a gang and ended up in prison. His words help Gabriel find strength to continue working toward his future. “Him saying what he said to me and everybody around me, really changed my perspective and [made me want] to do things for the better.”

Gabriel’s signature was the first on a petition of thousands of youth and adults launched on www.change.org asking the governor to sign seven bills that would improve school discipline.

Gabriel has enlisted in the Army to pay his way through college, but he says, “When I’m done, I would like to come back to Sacramento and help the youth out with trying to go to college.” He believes that arming the youth with proper tools is what can make this world a better place. And the Boys and Men of Color Network in Sacramento is helping him do just that. “This is a powerful movement. We are doing big things, influencing lives and changing them for the better. It’s just great.”



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BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR NETWORK

Building healthy communities starts with our youth, especially those that are disadvantaged. The Boys and Men of Color Network in Sacramento is a partnership of the California Endowment and other leaders throughout the state, Sacramento’s community-based organizations and school providers to address the problems that contribute to the inequities and crises facing boys and men of color. The network aims to implement system and policy changes that improve the health and success of boys and men of color.

Gabriel Brower speaking to youth at the launch of the Boys and Men of Color Network legislative hearings in 2011.

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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

A Little Extra Effort

BY MIKE BLOUNT

When Christine Salas, her husband Cesar, and their 1-year-old son Cesar Jr. walk into the doors of The Effort at the Oak Park Community Health Center, they are greeted with warm smiles and hugs. Salas says she thinks of the employees there as an extended family and without their efforts, she and her family wouldn't have received the necessary care they needed when she was pregnant. The Effort provides low-cost health care to low-income families and individuals.

“THEY REALLY HELPED US OUT WHEN WE NEEDED HELP AND THEY ARE STILL LOOKING OUT FOR US. IF THIS PLACE WASN'T HERE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE WOULD HAVE DONE. I CAN'T IMAGINE IT NOT BEING HERE.”

When the couple first found out they were expecting in 2011, finding low-cost prenatal care for their son was a top priority for them. By the time Salas was referred to the Oak Park Community Health Center in south Sacramento, she had already gone without prenatal care for six months. But as soon as she went to her first appointment at the facility, Salas says she found a welcoming environment that offered her all the care she and her family needed without worrying about the cost.

“Everyone [at The Effort] has just been so nice,” Salas says. “The doctors are very

informative and they answer any questions you have. They make you feel welcome. They're really family-oriented.”

Jonathan Porteus, CEO of The Effort, says the Oak Park location provides primary health care to about 3,000 patients in south Sacramento annually, offering a range of health care services. Their core operations are funded in part by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Grant, a 10-year \$1 billion program to improve community health in 14 challenged communities across California. Porteus says the Building Healthy Communities Grant allows The Effort to provide important services — like prenatal care — to low-income people living in south Sacramento.

“That's what we're calling our moon shot and The California Endowment is helping us with our moon shot, which is a blanket of health care for low-income people that has

never been seen before,” Porteus says. “What The California Endowment is doing is amazing and what we're doing is vital for the community.”

Salas agrees that having a place like The Effort to provide affordable health care in South Sacramento is critically important. Without it, Salas says she and her family are at a severe disadvantage and she hopes The Effort continues to help families like hers for years to come with the help of grants like the Building Healthy Communities Grant of The California Endowment.

“It's been really good [for our family],” Salas says. “They really helped us out when we needed help and they are still looking out for us. If this place wasn't here, I don't know what we would have done. I can't imagine it not being here.”

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THE EFFORT

The Effort is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that provides a full range of health care services to low-income families and individuals in Sacramento to transform and improve lives. The Effort at Oak Park Community Health Center serves 3,000 patients annually as a primary care provider and has a volume of 6,000 to 7,500 visits per year. The Effort's core operations are funded in part by the Building Healthy Communities Grant of The California Endowment, a 10-year \$1 billion plan to promote and advocate healthy communities.



The Salas family found affordable prenatal care at The Effort Oak Park Community Center in South Sacramento. The location serves 3,000 patients annually as a primary care provider.



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Bridging The Gap

BY CLAUDIA MOSBY

Adolescents and law enforcement officers have something significant in common. Both are frequently misperceived by others — including each other.

But the nonprofit Strategies For Youth (SFY) hopes to change this by training law enforcement officers in the science of child and youth development and mental health. Such training, referred to as developmental competence, provides officers with an understanding that children's and adolescents' perceptions and behaviors are influenced by biological and psychological factors related to their developmental stage.

IT'S A REMINDER THAT WE'RE NOT ON OPPOSING TEAMS."

—Lt. Lisa Hinz

"For some kids there is a reason we have to repeat things," says Lisa Thureau, founder and executive director of SFY. "We want officers to recognize, for example, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety disorders and to understand that a youth with these disorders isn't behaving in an intentional way. They're behaving as a consequence of their functional capacity."

Training in developmental competence is common, says Thureau, for other juvenile justice professionals like probation officers, attorneys and judges, but police officers do not receive similar training focused on standard youth development or how to recognize and respond to compromised youth and youth with learning disabilities.

"Some officers are using approaches that harm interaction with youth and lead to their criminalization," says Thureau. "Police, as gatekeepers, need to have this information. Both kids and officers will be helped when police officers understand how kids perceive, process and respond."

Thureau and her team are customizing a training for the Sacramento Police Department and the Sacramento City Unified School District using funding from a grant they received from The California Endowment. The team reviewed statistics from both agencies on suspension, expulsion and arrest rates. They also analyzed school code language and police department policies for working with youth and observed interactions at four of the district's high schools. Training is set to begin before September.

Lt. Lisa Hinz, who oversees the police department's school resource officer unit at Sacramento City Unified School District, is enthusiastic about the training.

"We want to bring this program to all of the Sacramento city schools and other agencies," says Hinz. "It's a good reminder to children, teens and officers in our community that we're all human

beings, really no different from one another. It's a reminder that we're not on opposing teams."

Tracey Lopez, manager of the Sacramento City Unified School District's Safe Schools and Security Services, sees the new program as a way to improve relationships between students and law enforcement officers.

"Respect is everything," says Lopez. "This program will go toward helping each side understand what respect means to the other."



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STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH

Strategies for Youth is a national organization focused on improving police and youth interactions, advancing the cause of training public safety officers in the science of child and youth development and mental health, and supporting communities partnering to promote strong police-youth relationships.

Through the Building Healthy Communities Grant, designed to support the development of communities where kids and youth are healthy, safe and ready to learn, The California Endowment has provided partial funding for an SFY joint training between the Sacramento Police Department and Sacramento City Unified School District.

Lt. Lisa Hinz of the Sacramento Police Department poses with student Joel Smith. Hinz oversees the police department's school resource officer unit at Sacramento City Unified School District.
Photo Credit: Mike Blount

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Banning The Box

BY LINDA DUBOIS

To a job seeker, the box on a job application asking about criminal history is just another formality. But for a formerly incarcerated person, this lone box is a barrier that could prevent them from making a positive contribution to the community — and it could even lead them back to a life of crime.

“WE KNOW THAT IF PEOPLE HAVE A JOB, THAT’S THE BEST SOURCE OF PREVENTION FOR RE-OFFENDING. WE’VE ALSO FOUND THAT AS SOON AS SOMEBODY INDICATES ON A JOB APPLICATION THAT THEY HAVE SOME SORT OF CRIMINAL HISTORY, THEY GET DISCARDED FROM ANY FURTHER CONSIDERATION.”

“We know that if people have a job, that’s the best source of prevention for re-offending. We’ve also found that as soon as somebody indicates on a job application that they have some sort of criminal history, they get discarded from any further consideration,” says Assemblyman

Roger Dickinson (D-Sacramento), who authored Assembly Bill 218, nicknamed the “Ban the Box” bill. It would prohibit requesting criminal background information on the initial employment application for local and state government employees.

If passed, California would join six states and more than 40 cities and counties across the United States that have adopted similar legislation. “What we’ve heard from them is they’ve gotten many, many qualified candidates, and then subsequently employees, who they never would have considered before,” Dickinson says. He adds some even reported it saving them money in the employment process by finding better qualified candidates more quickly.

The bill is supported by 80 organizations and sponsored by the National Employment Law Project, Legal Services for Prisoners With Children, All of Us or None, and PICO California, the parent organization of Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT), a grassroots group of more than 40 congregations, schools and neighborhood groups.

Because ACT’s mission is to build safe, healthy and just communities, this bill falls in line with its ongoing efforts, says Alicia Ross, executive director.

“We see this as part of our broader strategy of trying to create more opportunities for folks who are re-entering communities and could potentially stay on a pathway to further

crime versus getting back on a pathway to positive contribution,” Ross says.

Ross understands some employers’ hesitation to hire someone formerly incarcerated, such as those working in child care. AB 218 would not apply to positions working with children, the elderly or disabled, or to law enforcement positions. But it would give people access to the many low-risk jobs that would help these individuals rebuild their lives. And that would, in turn, make entire communities safer and more stable.

“Having that box on the initial application is cutting off the small pathway these people have back into becoming productive citizens. We’re interested in folks just getting a chance to get the interview and make the case that they’re changing their lives and why they would be a valuable employee,” Ross says. “This bill would be removing at least that initial barrier to people getting back on the honest track and being positive contributors to their community.”

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

A Better Approach to School Discipline

BY CLAUDIA MOSBY

Many schools have adopted zero tolerance policies to administer swift discipline when students violate a rule, such as bringing a gun to school or using drugs on campus. But zero tolerance school policies produce a cascade of negative effects: poorer quality education, higher dropout rates, and increased risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system, according to a recent report by The Civil Rights Project at UCLA.

“WE SEE TOO OFTEN SCHOOLS THAT ARE SYSTEMICALLY OUT OF ALIGNMENT WHEN IT COMES TO DISCIPLINE.”

—Darryl White
Black Parallel School Board chairman

“Zero tolerance doesn’t work. It’s never worked,” says Black Parallel School Board Chairman Darryl White. “The interpretation is broad and principals will respond differently given the same situation.” The board is working with The California Endowment to examine alternatives to California law, thereby reducing the negative impact of zero tolerance on students and their families.

Although the board was convened to address the quality of education for black students, White says his group helps all students by running “parallel”

to the Sacramento City Unified School District board, providing parents with a voice and vehicle for holding the district accountable on issues of concern.

For instance, White says zero tolerance policies disproportionately affect student groups based on their race. “African-Americans are at the lowest levels of [academic performance in] statewide, district-wide and school-wide data,” White adds. Sacramento City Unified School District suspension data reported to the California Department of Education would seem to confirm his assertion: 42 percent of African-American students received out-of-school (at home) willful defiance suspensions compared with 11 percent of white students in the 2011-2012 school year.

“We see too often schools that are systemically out of alignment when it comes to discipline,” White says.

“Principals aren’t trained to develop strong programs and usually maintain the management system they inherit when they get their first principalship.”

White and Black Parallel School Board Secretary Carl Pinkston are now training principals within the district on understanding the negative impacts of zero tolerance policies while challenging stakeholders to review suspension and expulsion data and re-examine the school’s student management system.

“We want them to ask two important questions,” White says. “First, ‘Do we like the results we are seeing relative to referrals, suspensions and expulsions?’ And second, ‘What would we like to see?’ The difference between these two questions becomes the work.”

Critical to success is a school’s understanding of how to work effectively with different ethnic and

cultural groups. “We’ve developed affinity groups – African-American, Native American, Southeast Asian, and Latino to zero in on why a disproportionate number of certain student groups are being suspended or expelled,” Pinkston says. “We’re looking for solutions. It’s not a cookie-cutter approach.”

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Chairman Darryl White, left, and Secretary Carl Pinkston, right, discuss education during a recent Black Parallel School Board meeting in Sacramento. Photo by Tara Patrick

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Navigating The Law

BY KENDALL FIELDS

When a natural gas facility needs to be sited or a transportation route needs to be cut, low-income neighborhoods are often targeted first.

Amy Williams at Legal Services of Northern California (LSNC) says this is because traditionally impoverished people are categorized as a group that won't stand up for themselves — maybe because of uncertainty about what to do or lack of knowledge about their legal rights. Williams, who is the regional counsel for health in Sacramento, works with a team of attorneys at LSNC to empower these people to navigate the law so they can not only understand their legal rights, but also act as their own advocates.

“BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE. IT’S ALWAYS UP TO A PERSON TO ASSERT [HIS] RIGHTS.”

-Amy Williams

The nonprofit receives funding for 1.5 attorney positions through The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities (BHC) grant, but actually has a team of five attorneys working on BHC-related projects, Williams explains. “Health is broader than just going to the doctor,” Williams explains. “We view health much like The California Endowment does — it's the ability to not only get

medical treatment, but to have access to transportation, get to school safely, to grow a garden and eat nutritious foods, feel secure in your environment.”

LSNC is the only legal services agency in Sacramento aiming to combat poverty through education, with the belief that a knowledge of the law and legal rights will level the playing field for low-income individuals. There are legal protections for so many things that low-income community members are facing, such as unlawful evictions and access to assistance, Williams says. But the problem is enforcement. LSNC gives people the tools to solve their own issues and become leaders. “Be your own advocate,” Williams advises. “It's always up to a person to assert [his] rights.”

LSNC provided legal guidance to citizens of Oak Park when McDonald's tried to put in a restaurant with a double drive-thru in 2012 at Stockton Boulevard and 2nd Avenue. The citizens were concerned that the design not only was unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists, it also posed a threat to public health. The activists formed The Healthy Development for Oak Park (HDOP) and collected more than 1,700 signatures. After hearing 30 members speak, Williams says the city Planning Commission ruled against the installation of the restaurant.

The concept of community lawyering is prevalent at LSNC. “We learn as much from the community as we can ever hope to teach,” Williams says. “We may

come in with an idea of what we'd like to do, then listen to what the community has to say and realize we are totally wrong and need to adjust how we can help.”

The LSNC team is working with local health clinics to create a medical-legal partnership so they can help individuals with everything from insurance coverage and medical bills to preventing illness.

LSNC has even started a community engagement effort to get community members talking about how they can improve their neighborhoods.

By educating clients on their legal rights, LSNC fosters self-sufficiency and what Williams likes to call “resident power.”

“I don't think you could argue that helping people with their basic needs is ever going to be a negative thing,” Williams says, explaining how her job is her civic duty and a way for her to give back to the community in which she lives.

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Amy Williams serves as the regional counsel for health at Legal Services of Northern California. She and her team work to help residents navigate the law and advocate for themselves.

Photo by Anne Stokes

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Undocumented Californian Facts

Number in CA: 2.6 million
Median age: 31

Economic Value*

Working Households	92%
Taxes Paid	\$2.7 billion
Contribution to CA Economy	\$302 billion

Attitudes

Economists who agree they benefit the economy	95%
Californians who say they deserve path to legal status	76%

Preventive Health Care Benefit

From \$1 spent on prenatal care	\$3 saved
From \$1 spent on child immunizations	\$16 saved

* Working household estimate is national stat.

Undocumented Californians without access to basic preventive health care: 1 million

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Code Breakers

ACCE pushes for accountability on neighborhood blight

BY MIKE BLOUNT

There is a pungent, unpleasant odor coming from one of the abandoned foreclosed homes in a neighborhood in South Sacramento. The house itself is in a state of disrepair. It's missing pieces of wood from the handrail on the front porch. The grass in the front yard is brown and long dead. Just a few houses down the street from it, another house sits abandoned with all of the windows boarded up to prevent squatters and drug users from occupying it.

“SINCE WE STARTED WORKING AND ORGANIZING, I WOULD SAY 90 PERCENT OF THE HOMES HAVE BEEN CLEANED UP AND ARE EVEN BEING RENTED OUT NOW.”

-Amelia Garduno, lead organizer for ACCE in Sacramento

These houses are examples of a new problem arising from the sheer number of foreclosed homes in recent years, according to Amelia Garduno, lead organizer for the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE). Garduno's organization works to hold owners accountable for blight on their property by organizing community members to push for stronger code enforcement.

ACCE is funded by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative to promote healthier neighborhoods.

“We asked the residents, ‘What are your main concerns?’ and these vacant and blighted homes kept coming up, so we started working to find solutions, take action and bring the community together in a positive way,” Garduno says. “I used to live in [South Sacramento] when I was younger, so it was really a personal issue to see my neighborhood worse than it was 20 to 30 years ago.”

The city of Sacramento requires the owner of a vacant property that has been cited for code violations to be listed on the front door of the property. If the owner has fallen on hard times, Garduno says ACCE will organize a community cleanup to get the property up to standards. In cases where the home is owned by a bank, ACCE puts pressure on city officials to enforce the city code, including fines and penalties until the property is fixed.

Some of the houses — aside from being an eyesore and bringing down surrounding property values — are also health hazards to these neighborhoods, Garduno says. Foreclosed properties often attract unwanted elements into the community such as squatters, drug users and drug dealers, who refer to abandoned properties where they can come and go freely as “trap houses.”

“Kids couldn't even go outside because they were finding needles and [drug paraphernalia] lying on the ground outside their front doors,” Garduno says. “Blight brings endless health concerns, and for kids to be exposed to that is ridiculous.”

Garduno says there are other health concerns like mold, rats and feces left from feral cats who have taken over the property.

But since her organization began taking action a little over a year ago, conditions in South Sacramento neighborhoods have improved immensely. ACCE conducted several community-led cleanups of vacant properties, as well as protests against bank-owned blighted properties. But there is still work to do.

“Since we started working and organizing, I would say 90 percent of the homes have been cleaned up and are even being rented out now,” Garduno says. “It brings a completely different feel and energy to the neighborhood. People are taking more responsibility because they see other houses in their neighborhood are being taken care of and they want to take care of theirs. It's been amazing to see what's happening.”

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.



Amelia Garduno, lead organizer for ACCE in Sacramento, brings community members together to take on neighborhood blight in South Sacramento.

Photo by Mike Blount

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Addressing Trauma in Youth

BY CLAUDIA MOSBY

In communities with persistent poverty, violence and addiction, constant exposure to these problems often give rise to trauma in young people. Reaching youth early can move them from surviving to thriving and offer additional benefits to family and community.

“Research has shown certain areas of the brain related to memory, emotional regulation and impulse control are deeply affected by traumatic events, resulting in delayed development or impaired functioning,” says Melissa Bayne, Ph.D., the manager of Youth Development Programs at WellSpace Health.

“VIOLENCE BEGETS RETALIATORY VIOLENCE AND INCREASES FAMILY CONFLICT. OFTENTIMES, WHEN TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES HAPPEN TO ONE PERSON, WE SEE A RIPPLE EFFECT IN THE FAMILY.”

- Melissa Bayne, Ph.D, Manager of Youth Development Programs at WellSpace Health. .

Bayne runs the Sacramento Violence Intervention (SVI) program, which serves

victims ages 15-25 who have been shot, stabbed or otherwise physically assaulted. “Early intervention is key. When the brain is still developing, it has the capacity to learn novel ways of accommodating deficiencies in its own development,” she says. “Providing appropriate care early on gives the young person’s brain its best chance at recovery.”

WellSpace uses trauma-informed care (TIC), a relatively new approach that changes the care paradigm from one that asks the client, “What’s wrong with you?” to one that asks, “What happened to you?”

“This question in and of itself increases the efficacy of our treatments,” Bayne says. “It enhances rapport and increases a sense of safety. The openness to behavioral change and treatment is higher when youth are treated with compassion and understanding.”

Failing to make such a change in perspective can cause providers to misperceive trauma-induced behavior as defiant, which only perpetuates social disparity and stigma.

When youth are adversely affected, families and communities are also impacted. “Violence begets retaliatory violence and increases family conflict,” Bayne explains. “Oftentimes, when traumatic experiences happen to one person, we see a ripple effect in the family.” For example, if a youth is shot leaving the house to go to school, Bayne says other family members may develop the same fear of leaving the house.

For this reason, WellSpace sometimes accepts into its program friends and family members who have higher risks for injury themselves and involvement in retaliatory violence, which the SVI Program attempts to pre-empt.

With a new BRAIN Initiative from the White House, President Obama’s call for a national dialogue on mental illness and the extension of mental health services to millions of Americans, public awareness regarding mental health is unprecedented.

As part of the President’s Dialogue, Bayne will participate in *Creating Community Solutions – Sacramento*, a July 20 forum to give citizens the opportunity to address community mental health concerns and priorities, particularly as concerns youth.

“I am proud to say that Sacramento is owning the care of its kids,” Bayne adds. “They come in as crusty little bulbs, but we add enough water and they blossom.”

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Melissa Bayne is the manager of Youth Development Programs at WellSpace Health. She runs a program that serves victims of violence ages 15-25.

Photo by Anne Stokes



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A Dangerous Intersection Waits For Improvements

BY NATASHA VON KAENEL

Michelle Murigi was 16 years old and only five days away from her 17th birthday, January 19, 2012. On her way home from West Campus High School, she crossed the intersection of 58th Street and Fruitridge Road in Tahoe Park at a marked crosswalk. The first car stopped, but the car in the next lane did not see her and she was hit. She died the next day.

“I THINK IT’S SAD THAT WE SPEND SO MUCH OF OUR MONEY ON EXPANDING ROADS WHEN WE SHOULD BE SPENDING IT ON HOW TO MAKE OUR CURRENT ROADS AS SAFE AS WE CAN.”

- Terry Preston, Complete Streets Coordinator of Walk Sacramento

“That tragic death really showed that this was an area that needed to be looked at,” says Terry Preston, the Complete Streets Coordinator of Walk Sacramento. Walk Sacramento organized a “walk audit” of the intersection to see how pedestrians and drivers interact at this intersection, and while they were there, Preston says he observed many near accidents. “I’m sad to say that it was not surprising that someone

eventually was killed,” he says.

With funding help from the California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities grant, Walk Sacramento is working to make this intersection safer. But to do that the city would need to put in a traffic signal, and it has been hard to get the city on board. Preston says, “These things are expensive. They can get up to \$250,000 to \$500,000.” He explains that the city’s policy is to put in one traffic signal per year, and “despite the fatality a year ago, this intersection is ranked about 10th or so on the list.”

But they have made some headway. Preston is happy to say that the city put up a sign warning pedestrians that the traffic does not stop and repainted the crosswalk, but he says the work is not over. After Walk Sacramento, friends and family of Michelle Murigi made comments at the May 21 City Council meeting, councilmembers expressed interest in installing a traffic light, if given some help. “They’re happy to consider installing a traffic signal, as long as additional funding can be found to offset the cost. And so we are working with the school districts right now to urge them to come up with some of the funding,” he says.

There are five schools in the area, and kids have to cross this street every day to get to and from school. Preston urges residents that live in the Sacramento City Unified

School District to contact their school board member and voice their opinion about installing a traffic signal.

Preston is disappointed about the way the city allocates funding for roads. “I think it’s sad that we spend so much of our money on expanding roads when we should be spending it on how to make our current roads as safe as we can,” he says. He hopes that his work to make this intersection safer will ensure that Michelle Murigi did not die in vain.

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Terry Preston stands next to the repainted crosswalk at the intersection at 58th Street and Fruitridge Road. He hopes that the city will soon install a traffic signal to make it safer.

Photo by Anne Stokes



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Roll Call

Sacramento School District aims to keep kids in school

BY MIKE BLOUNT

On any given weekday morning most students across Sacramento City Unified School District are rushing into classrooms, preparing to learn. But there are still many empty desks in those classrooms. School officials are working hard to develop solutions to reduce chronic absences to get students back in school.

“ON THE SURFACE IF A STUDENT IS ABSENT, WE JUST SEE THEM AS BEING ABSENT. BUT IF THERE’S A PATTERN OVER TIME, AND WE BEGIN TO TRY TO FIGURE OUT THE REASONS, WE BEGIN TO SEE THERE’S A LITTLE BIT MORE COMPLEXITY TO THEIR SITUATIONS.”

Barbara Kronick, director of integrated support services at SCUSD

According to SCUSD records for the 2010-2011 school year, more than one in 10 students were chronically absent or severely absent — meaning they missed at least 10 percent of the days they were enrolled for a semester. Statistically, students who are absent for greater than 10 percent of a semester have a harder time catching up with the rest of their class. If they are chronically absent year after year, it causes a cumulative impact where the student may never be able to catch up without additional support.

Director of Integrated Support Services at SCUSD Barbara Kronick says the district has spent the last year collecting data on these 5,020 students to analyze and help develop interventions to increase their attendance.

This initiative is funded by The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities grant to promote healthier neighborhoods. The California Endowment believes a student’s attendance in school directly correlates to that student’s success.

“On the surface if a student is absent, we just see them as being absent,” Kronick says. “But if there’s a pattern over time, and we begin to try to figure out the reasons, we begin to see there’s a little bit more complexity to their situations.”

Kronick says SCUSD is working on engaging both parents and students through several programs — some modeled after successful efforts in other school districts and others that will be completely unique to Sacramento. The Parent Teacher Home Visit Project began in Sacramento as a way for students, parents and teachers to have a meaningful dialogue. As a result, Kronick says the district has seen increased attendance rates. But she adds there is no one-size-fits-all solution and finding an effective means of intervention for every chronically absent student will take time.

“We can make some assumptions about what the barriers are that are keeping them from school, but I think we have to be careful until we actually talk to the families,” Kronick says. “That is really the next phase — digging

deeper into who these students are and finding out why each of them is absent. We have to fully understand the problem.”

Part of this will include more targeted outreach to parents, according to Kronick. SCUSD is also working on getting community members involved to help implement after-school and weekend programs to reach out to students who may be transitioning from one school to another.

Whatever the circumstance, Kronick says district officials remain committed to every student receiving a quality education.

“I believe it is incumbent upon us to try to find out what’s going on,” Kronick says. “That’s our role — doing better outreach and building a relationship with the parents to help us understand.”

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Barbara Kronick is the director of integrated support services at Sacramento City Unified School District.

Photo by Mike Blount



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Reaping the Benefits of Local Food

Farmer and advocate launches bid for regional food aggregation hub

BY SHANNON SPRINGMEYER

A new proposal submitted to the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) could help increase the flow of locally grown fresh produce to schools, hospitals and underserved communities in our region.

Shawn Harrison of Soil Born Farms received a grant from The California Endowment and the USDA to develop a feasibility study for “a locally-serving food hub which facilitates the aggregation of product from small and mid-size farmers and gets that into local hospitals, food banks, stores, retail, etc.,” Harrison says. He is working in conjunction with SACOG to build the food aggregation hub infrastructure, which is lacking in the Sacramento Valley region.

“URBAN POPULATIONS HAVE BECOME MUCH MORE DISCONNECTED FROM THEIR FOOD ... WE’RE INTERESTED IN HAVING FOOD BE A MORE CENTRAL COMPONENT OF OUR DAILY LIVES.”

Shawn Harrison, founder and co-director of Soil Born Farms

Soil Born Farms has been working with The California Endowment for six years, and is involved in promoting food access efforts in the South Sacramento area through the endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative. Soil Born Farms has been working

with residents, businesses and experts to increase the capacity in our region to grow more food to be consumed locally.

“Urban populations have become much more disconnected from their food,” Harrison says. “As a result of that our health has declined, our commitment to producing food sustainably and ecologically has declined, and I think our community, in terms of its identity and its integration has declined. We’re interested in having food be a more central component of our daily lives.”

Harrison says a food aggregation hub is an important piece of the puzzle because small and mid-size growers in the region simply don’t have a way to connect to many potential local markets. The hub would allow farmers to pool their products and would offer services to aid in marketing and distributing produce to gain entry to previously untapped markets.

Many groups stand to gain from keeping locally produced food local, including traditional distributors who would tap into local food sources if the infrastructure existed, Harrison says. Hospitals and schools would also benefit, as large institutional food markets such as these don’t currently have an effective way of sourcing locally grown food.

The plan also offers a tremendous potential for economic benefits. “It’s a huge opportunity for our region that other regions simply do not have,” Harrison adds.

But perhaps the most compelling outcome is that of improving the health of people in our communities. Getting more fresh local produce

on school menus, for example, offers far-reaching implications.

“If we can improve the diets of those kids that are typically in underserved situations, we’re saving them a lot of health problems, and our community a lot of disease management over time,” Harrison says. “I want to see those kids having better foods in their bodies, and right now they’re eating a largely processed-food diet.”

The cost of investing in infrastructure like the food hub is dwarfed by the costs of caring for chronic disease caused by poor nutrition, according to Harrison.

“The cost to our community of not doing this is so astronomical that an investment like this could literally change the economic health ... of our community in a lifetime,” Harrison says.

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Shawn Harrison wants to help connect small to mid-size farmers in the region with new markets to increase access to locally grown food.

Photo by Anne Stokes



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Taking a Stand

School district combats bullying with prevention program

BY MIKE BLOUNT

As many as half of all children are bullied at some point during their school years, according to a study by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and 52 percent of students reported they had been bullied online, according to the Cyberbullying Research Center.

Teachers and faculty at Sacramento City Unified School District, along with key community members, hope to put an end to this pervasive problem in Sacramento schools through an anti-bullying program implemented in 2011.

“IF WE WANT TO GET TO THE ACADEMIC WORK, WE NEED KIDS TO BE ABLE TO FOCUS, AND THEY CAN’T FOCUS IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY ARE FEELING FRIGHTENED, DISRESPECTED OR THEY’RE NOT SHOWING UP FOR CLASS BECAUSE THEY DON’T FEEL SAFE.”

Lawrence Shweky, coordinator of integrated support services

The program is partly funded by the Building Healthy Communities Grant of The California Endowment, a 10-year initiative to promote healthier neighborhoods throughout the state.

As the coordinator of integrated support services for Sacramento City USD, Lawrence Shweky oversees a variety of programs to support students social and emotional needs, including the anti-bullying program. Shweky says at its core, the program aims to promote an overall climate of respect and inclusion beginning in elementary school through high school.

“We’re in about nine schools now with our curriculum called Steps to Respect, and we’re going to be adding four more and increase it each year” Shweky says. “Working with kids at early ages and helping them learn respectful behaviors, inclusive behaviors, how to negotiate conflict — that’s all of the basic elements of bullying prevention.”

Shweky says Steps to Respect largely consists of scripted curriculum that teachers follow and exercise-based scenarios that students take part in to help raise awareness and assist them in their decision making. Shweky says students are given an opportunity to share their own personal stories and build bridges and relationships with their classmates. The curriculum is spread out over 20 weeks for about two hours a week.

Students also have access to a hotline they can call to anonymously report bullying on or off campus. Faculty encourage parents, students and community members to call the hotline and help prevent students from suffering prolonged harassment and damage to their reputation.

Shweky adds that a large part of bullying prevention also relies on developing partnerships

within the community. One of the largest at-risk populations for school bullying is the LGBT community, and to help prevent bullying of those students, Sacramento City USD is supporting the development of gay-straight alliance clubs within schools.

“If we want to get to the academic work, we need kids to be able to focus, and they can’t focus in an environment where they are feeling frightened, disrespected or they’re not showing up for class because they don’t feel safe,” Shweky explains. “I think this is among one of the most important goals we have as educators.”

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Lawrence Shweky speaks with a student about Steps to Respect, a new anti-bullying program at Sacramento City Unified School District. Teaching young students about respectful behaviors helps to prevent bullying.

Photo by Mike Blount



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

You Get What You Give

Young man inspired to empower youth through outreach

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Luis Guerrero is like most college kids. He enjoys hanging out with friends, listening to music, and he's excited about his future. But the 22-year-old Sacramento State electrical engineering major says he wasn't always like this.

Growing up as a troubled youth, he flirted with the gang lifestyle and got into trouble often for fighting and stealing. Eventually, Guerrero says he decided he wasn't living up to his potential. Looking back on those experiences after he graduated high school made Guerrero realize that he could make a difference in the lives of youth in the community. He was proof that they could turn their lives around and put themselves on a different path.

In 2011, Guerrero and a couple of his friends contacted their former high schools to find out how they could get involved in helping at-risk youth. That's when he found out about a new Boys and Men of Color collaborative starting up through the Sacramento Building Healthy Communities Hub. The coalition works with nonprofits like La Familia to affect positive change in the community. It is funded by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities grant.

"As soon as I heard the name, I was sold," Guerrero says. "I understand the struggle that exists for boys and men of color because I am a man of color, so it was important for me to lend my support. I knew the potential from just hearing the name."

Through Boys and Men of Color, he has helped organize several workshops and helped coordinate the Boys and Men of Color summit this past summer, an event that brings together boys and men of color to take community action toward health, safety and better education in Sacramento. Guerrero will also be involved with planning and coordinating the Boys and Men of Color summit next year.

"I UNDERSTAND THE STRUGGLE THAT EXISTS FOR BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR BECAUSE I AM A MAN OF COLOR, SO IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO LEND MY SUPPORT. I KNEW THE POTENTIAL FROM JUST HEARING THE NAME."

Luis Guerrero

Guerrero says that Boys and Men of Color are just getting started in making an impact in the community, but there is still much work to be done. He encourages anyone who wants to get involved to contact Boys and Men of Color to find out how they can help.

"The Sacramento Boys and Men of Color is a collaborative and anyone can join," Guerrero says. "We need to start up after school programs and open basketball courts for teams. We need

art spaces for kids to do graffiti and we need to open music studios for kids that like to make beats. We need to give them options and somewhere to explore their minds."

Guerrero adds that he believes in the power of outreach and its potential to change lives. Ultimately, he hopes to continue working with youth in the community long after he graduates from college.

"The work we're doing is important for the community because we want to have safer communities and healthy communities," Guerrero says. "We want to have safe schools and educated students, and the only way we're going to achieve those goals is by investing in the population that has the highest dropout rates, incarceration rates, and suspension and expulsion rates."

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College student Luis Guerrero began volunteering with Boys and Men of Color because he wanted to give back to his community.
Photo by Mike Blount



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Making Food Fun

Nonprofit educates kids on how to eat healthy

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Getting kids to eat healthier doesn't just mean telling them to "eat their vegetables," according to Amber Stott, founder of the California Food Literacy Center. It's about food literacy.

Stott's organization aims to prevent obesity in children from lower-income neighborhoods by going into classrooms and teaching students how to eat healthier. The California Food Literacy Center also holds taste-testing sessions and invites local chefs to share their healthy recipes.

Using her background in nonprofit work and her passion for healthy foods, Stott acts as a cheerleader for fruits and vegetables, getting kids excited about kiwi and cauliflower. If given the choice, she believes more kids would eat healthy foods if they had the opportunity to learn about the nutritional value of fruits and vegetables and how to prepare them for meals. But often, poor eating habits are passed down from parents to their children.

"As a society, I think we understand that fruits and vegetables are good for us, but there is a critical gap and that is food literacy," Stott says. "If you don't know how to prepare [vegetables] in a way that is delicious, you're not going to eat [them]."

By introducing children to different ways to prepare fruits and vegetables, Stott hopes kids will form good eating habits while they are young that will last their whole lives. And if

children are excited about eating fruits and vegetables, she adds it could create a ripple effect in the household where adults feel encouraged to eat healthier foods with their kids.

One of the first major backers of the California Food Literacy Center was The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities campaign, which gave Stott a grant to expand a summer program to reach 2,400 kids. Stott says that ultimately she would like to reach every kid

"THE SOONER YOU CAN GET KIDS EXPOSED TO FRUITS AND VEGETABLES, THE HEALTHIER THEY WILL BE BECAUSE THEY ARE CREATING A HABIT THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME."

Amber Stott, founder of the California Food Literacy Center

in Sacramento with the message that good eating habits lead to good health.

"There are multiple studies that show that a low intake of vegetables in childhood leads to an array of diseases throughout a life span, including heart disease, diabetes and allergies," Stott says. "The sooner you can get kids exposed to fruits

and vegetables, the healthier they will be because they are creating a habit that will last a lifetime."

Stott says that despite the health benefits, there are several obstacles that make it difficult to change eating habits. Among them are two generations of Americans that do not cook healthy meals or do not have the resources to do so, and the large marketing campaigns of the processed food industry.

"We're up against these giant marketing machines for junk food and they're targeting our kids, so we have to do the same thing, but for fruits and vegetables," Stott says. "We're cheerleading and bringing a positive message, trying to be as colorful and exciting as some of these cartoon characters are for junk food because at the end of the day, the majority of your options are going to be processed food."

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Amber Stott combined her background in nonprofits and her personal passion for promoting healthy foods to create the California Food Literacy Center.
Photo by Anne Stokes



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

One-stop Center for Students in Need

BY LINDA DUBOIS

A few years ago, teachers, administrators, psychologists, or anyone concerned about a student in the Sacramento City Unified School District often didn't know where exactly to go for help.

For example, a foster child in special education with health problems suddenly had a change in behavior. His teacher might wonder, "Should I call Foster Youth Services, the Special Education Department, Health Services or someone else?"

"What would end up happening is people would call all these different departments, and they'd be put on hold, sent to voice mails, people wouldn't return their calls and meanwhile this child and his family's needs were not being met," explains Nichole C. Wofford, a marriage and family therapist and social worker with the school district.

It became clear there needed to be a centralized gateway for resources that could be used by students, parents, administrators and teachers. A SCUSD mental health collaborative looking to expand mental health services within the district began working on a solution.

The result was the Connect Center, which opened in January 2011 at the SCUSD office. It connects people to both in-district services and a wide variety of community partners, such as Legal Services of Northern California, Sacramento County Children's Mental Health, several health insurance companies and more.

"So there's one phone call (or email or walk-in

visit)," says Wofford, the center's manager. "We will actually case manage and walk you through the process of getting this family the support they need."

Wofford runs the center with a social worker, two family advocates (case managers) and usually one to three Sacramento State social-work interns. As of September 2013, they had opened 2,140 cases,

"WE HAVE GOTTEN LETTERS FROM PRINCIPALS THAT HAVE SAID, 'I AM CONVINCED THAT YOUR SUPPORT SAVED THIS STUDENT'S LIFE.'"

Nichole C. Wofford
SCUSD Connect Center manager

an average of about 800 per year.

Case management, the center's primary umbrella service, involves working with students and families who have problems that run the gamut: mental health or behavior issues; lack of food, clothing, shelter or furniture in the home; legal problems; tutoring needs; a death, illness or job loss in the family; etc. This can also include crisis intervention, such as suicide assessment and referral.

Health-insurance enrollment connects young people with health care. "We've had many, many examples where the family has no insurance and the only place they can take

the child is the emergency room — or they're undocumented and are fearful of coming forth because they're afraid of being deported," Wofford says. A bilingual family advocate walks them through how to get enrolled and how to use the insurance.

The other family advocate heads the LGBT services. "This population has been identified as being extremely vulnerable and at risk of challenges at school such as poor grades, poor attendance, bullying, depression, suicidality, homelessness, and substance abuse, so we have a dedicated person who works with the schools and does mentoring for the LGBT youth so they have someone to talk to," Wofford says. "We have gotten letters from principals that have said, 'I am convinced that your support saved this student's life.'"

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.

Sacramento City Unified School District Connect Center Manager Nichole C. Wofford says the center serves as a centralized gateway for resources in the district.
Photo by Laura Anthony



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Part of the Process

BY MIKE BLOUNT

When it comes to making decisions about planning and development in low-income neighborhoods in Sacramento, community voices are often noticeably absent from the discussion. Sacramento Housing Alliance is trying to change that through a new program that trains community members to become future leaders who influence policy changes on land use, transportation, housing and jobs in their neighborhoods.

Sacramento Housing Alliance was formed 25 years ago to advocate for affordable housing on behalf of community members living on fixed or low-incomes. Through the third cohort of the Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI) program, community members have the opportunity to advocate for themselves.

During five months and 80 hours of leadership development training, residents in Sacramento learn about how policies are made and how they can be an advocate on a board or commission to make sure that low-income — and communities of color — can become part of the process of decision making in their communities. The program is funded by the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment and it is the first program of its kind in Sacramento.

“A lot of times, Sacramento Housing Alliance is acting like the public is supposed to act by attending public meetings,” says Veronica Beaty, land use policy director. “But I think the Building Healthy Communities grant is helping us identify and connect people who want to

be a part of the process, so we can kind of make ourselves redundant. It is letting us shift our role to people who actually live in these communities.”

Beaty adds that having community members involved in the decision-making process

“I THINK THE BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES GRANT IS HELPING US IDENTIFY AND CONNECT PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BE A PART OF THE PROCESS, SO WE CAN KIND OF MAKE OURSELVES REDUNDANT. IT IS LETTING US SHIFT OUR ROLE TO PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY LIVE IN THESE COMMUNITIES.”

Veronica Beaty, land use policy director for Sacramento Housing Alliance

strengthens communities as more residents become invested in making their neighborhoods better places to live. Mai Vang, a current BCLI trainee, says the program has made her more aware of the different issues that affect decision-making in her community.

“For the past month, BCLI has helped me to rethink and reframe conversations to bring race, ethnicity, class, gender and disabilities back to the forefront of my community and policy work,” Vang says. “Through the program, I’m learning various strategies that decision makers and advocates are using to address the needs of low-income communities of color in the Sacramento region.”

Monthly through December, BCLI participants will host a public forum on current topics important to communities in the region. The next BCLI public forum, Transportation for Everyone, will take place at 6 p.m. on Nov. 6 at Mercy Housing’s Community Room at 7th and H streets in downtown Sacramento. For more information on the program and how to get involved, visit www.sachousingalliance.org/programs/boards-commissions-leadership-institute.

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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The Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute is a program of the Sacramento Housing Alliance that helps low-income community members train to become advocates for their communities. From left to right: Veronica Beaty and Samantha Hodges of the Sacramento Housing Alliance. Photo by Mike Blount



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

A Home for Health

BY MIKE BLOUNT

With the Affordable Care Act officially launching in January, many people who are without insurance or under-insured in South Sacramento are shopping for health care coverage through the new state-based health insurance marketplace, Covered California. But does South Sacramento have enough health care providers to meet the demand of an influx of new patients into the health care system? Capitol Health Network Executive Director Jim Ellsworth says his organization has been working to address that concern.

Capitol Health Network is a nonprofit partnership of health care providers and organizations that work to provide a safety net for uninsured and under-insured residents in Sacramento. The organization is funded by a Building Healthy Communities grant from The California Endowment.

Part of Capitol Health Network's mission is helping to raise funds to build new community health centers in South Sacramento. While many patients may experience long wait times to see a doctor, Ellsworth says community health centers provide quicker and better service than you would typically get through a private practice. One recently opened at a new site in South Sacramento.

"[Sacramento Community Clinic] is a large site that will be able to handle several tens of thousands of people," Ellsworth says. "Community health centers offer a rounded set of services that include primary medical

care, but also other ancillary services like behavioral health care and other specialized care, which are not available through a private doctor's office."

"COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS OFFER A ROUNDED SET OF SERVICES THAT INCLUDE PRIMARY MEDICAL CARE, BUT ALSO OTHER ANCILLARY SERVICES LIKE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE AND OTHER SPECIALIZED CARE, WHICH ARE NOT AVAILABLE THROUGH A PRIVATE DOCTOR'S OFFICE."

Jim Ellsworth, executive director of Capitol Health Network

In addition to the services offered at community health centers, Capitol Health Network also offers patient navigation services, which help patients find health care providers either through phone assistance or even transportation to appointments. For situations where a cultural barrier may keep a person from seeking medical assistance, counseling is available to help those community members overcome stigma.

With patient navigation services and the ancillary services offered through community health centers, Ellsworth says he envisions community health centers being the "medical home" for a lot of the new patients entering the health care system next year. He adds that more community health centers are being planned and developed to be built in the coming year.

"The Building Healthy Communities grant has focused our organization to provide health care in a high-touch, high-value methodology, which has allowed us to collaborate in a way that we have never been able to in the past," Ellsworth says.

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Jerry T. Bliatout, CEO of Health and Life Organization, meets with Jim Ellsworth and Dr. J. Miguel Suarez, director of development at HALO, at the recently built Sacramento Community Clinic in South Sacramento. Ellsworth, executive director for Capitol Health Network, says community health centers are a more comprehensive approach to health care. Photo by Tara Patrick



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Students Savor Salad Bar

BY LINDA DUBOIS

Every school day about 40,000 students in the Sacramento City Unified School District bite into some crunchy lettuce or vine-ripened fruit at lunchtime.

Many come from low-income urban neighborhoods and having access to farm-fresh produce every day is a real treat.

After the Farm-to-School program was launched during the 2009-10 school year — incorporating local farms' products into school lunches — many schools had salad bars, but not all. "There were a lot of administrators and principals who were not necessarily sold on salad bars. They thought the kids wouldn't like them," says Diana Flores, the district's supervisor for Farm-to-School produce and menu design.

But Superintendent Jonathan Raymond loved the idea and believed students would too, so he instructed every campus to put in a salad bar within a year.

This meant many schools needed new salad-bar serving stations. A large percentage were donated by Whole Foods and others were purchased or upgraded with help from Salad Bars 2 Schools campaign funding, which is provided by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities grant.

In 2011-12, every school had a salad bar. "I wouldn't say there was a single kid who didn't love it, because kids love to make their own choices," Flores says. "The salad bar

complements the meal. A student selects a main hot entree and then goes through the salad bar."

Each salad bar offers about seven different items that meet specific nutritional requirements mandated by the USDA and overseen by the California Department of Education's Nutrition Services Division. They always include a green leafy vegetable like romaine lettuce or spinach, a fresh fruit, garbanzo or kidney beans and other vegetables, such as carrots, corn, jicama sticks, cucumber slices, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes or sliced bell peppers. Specific choices are often seasonal.

"WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT THE PRODUCE IS IT'S PICKED FRESH AND IT'S HERE QUICK — AND THE KIDS LOVE IT."

Diana Flores, SCUSD Farm-to-School supervisor

"We have a great relationship with a lot of the local farmers," Flores says. In October, the district got pears from Courtland. Over the cooler months, they'll get mandarins from Penryn, oranges from Sanger and apples from Stockton. Next spring, they'll get watermelon from Vierra Farms in West Sacramento.

Kids often get a kick out of trying varieties they haven't had before — such as mandarin-sized seckel pears from Stillwater Orchards in

Courtland. "They're tiny, tiny little pears and most people look at them and wouldn't even know they're a pear," Flores says.

The district is fortunate to be large enough to have its own storage warehouse, along with trucks and drivers that deliver food to the school sites, Flores says.

"Because of that, the growers can just drop to one location," she says. "What's great about the produce is it's picked fresh and it's here quick — and the kids love it."

People continue to be amazed that kids actually like the salad bars, she says.

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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Diana Flores, SCUSD Farm-to-School supervisor, says many students enjoy a healthy salad for lunch. As of the 2011-12 school year, every school within the district had a salad bar.
Photo by Tara Patrick



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Planting the Seeds of Change

BY MIKE BLOUNT

When it came to zoning the city of Sacramento, the old mindset was that agriculture should take place on large swaths of land far outside of the city. Once produce was ready to harvest, it would be trucked in and distributed. But with more and more research showing that quality of life is directly related to access to fresh foods, that mindset is slowly eroding. Residents are now pushing to change the zoning codes that prohibit them from growing and selling food within city limits.

In South Sacramento, Pesticide Watch is helping to raise awareness of the benefits of urban agriculture. The nonprofit was started in 1991 with the mission of reducing Californians' exposure to pesticides. To help community members organize, Pesticide Watch launched Sacramentans for Sustainable Community Agriculture (SSCA), which is funded by the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment.

Community Organizing Associate Laurel Rhodes says that by allowing residents to grow their own food and sell it, it not only increases community access to fresh food, it also reduces their exposure to pesticides. The group is currently lobbying city officials to adopt language that supports urban agriculture.

"We're helping the group plan a campaign, and it's really taken off since it started," Rhodes says. "Residents are becoming more concerned about where their food comes from, and they want to be more connected with the production of their food. As an organization, Pesticide

Watch has really been able to nurture the local food activists."

Chanowk Yisrael, an urban agriculture advocate and member of SSCA, says urban agriculture provides new economic opportunities and job creation, and it also helps beautify the community. But to Yisrael, it's much more than that — to him, the movement is really about rebuilding the community from the inside out.

"I'm from South Oak Park, and in my neighborhood, it's nothing but liquor stores and convenience stores," Yisrael says. "There's no access to any kind of healthy food. As a result of that, people are in a depressed state of mind. Being able to go in and put up a garden beautifies the community, and people take notice. Food is a universal thing and it brings people together."

"RESIDENTS ARE BECOMING MORE CONCERNED ABOUT WHERE THEIR FOOD COMES FROM, AND THEY WANT TO BE MORE CONNECTED WITH THE PRODUCTION OF THEIR FOOD."

Laurel Rhodes, community organizing associate for Pesticide Watch

One small garden is doing just that in a neighborhood in Oak Park. As part of a community service learning project with the S.A.V.A. School, a Twin Rivers district charter,

10 students created a garden over the course of five weeks on a previously empty lot. The food produced in the garden will go to local food banks to distribute to people in need.

Student Amanda Barrera says she was honored to have the opportunity to help create the garden.

"This is not about just growing for yourself," Barrera says. "It's for everybody. I grew up in this community, and it just feels wonderful to give back to it."

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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Urban farming advocate, Chanowk Yisrael, and S.A.V.A. School student, Amanda Barrera, work in an urban garden in Sacramento. The garden was created by 10 students in five weeks over 21 hours. Photo by Mike Blount



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Girls Leading the Way

BY ALI BRIMHALL

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Cardboard pizza, mystery meat and questionable freshness. If you've had lunch from a school cafeteria, chances are that these are familiar complaints. More than just an annoyance, however, these sub-par school lunches can have a serious impact on students' health and development. And a group of bright young women in South Sacramento plan to do something about it.

Recently, eight of these girls gathered around a table, calling out suggestions for words to include in a mission statement written on a whiteboard at the end of the room. They are the first participants of Girls on the Rise, a yearlong mentorship program funded by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities grant, in affiliation with the Center for Community Health and Well Being. Once a month, these girls have dedicated an evening after school to making their neighborhood a safer, healthier place.

While mentors are always present for guidance at the meetings, adults take a backseat to the younger generation. "Girls on the Rise is focused on improving our own community, not through someone else," says Jaelyn Singleton, a 15-year-old attending C.K. McClatchy High School. This autonomy helps the program's young women gain self confidence and seek out solutions on their own. At the end of the year, they will use the skills they have acquired to

organize a conference for their peers, modeled after the annual Boys and Young Men of Color conference, with speakers and activities that the young women have selected.

"[This group] gives them the skills and **"THERE IS NOTHING MORE POWERFUL THAN A YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE."**

Shannon Read, Program Manager of Girls on the Rise

support they need to have their voices heard," says program manager Shannon Read. "There is nothing more powerful than a young woman's voice."

The program kicked off in August with a two-day summit at Sacramento State, filled with group activities intended to foster a spirit of cooperation. At subsequent meetings, the girls began research into problems they had observed in their community, narrowed these issues down to three and took it to a vote. They decided to focus on improving school lunches, which the girls have observed to be unhealthy and overprocessed. They share a concern for the high number of students on the free or reduced-price lunch program, whose health may suffer due to the poor quality of food being served to them.

At November's meeting, the young women of

Girls on the Rise crafted a mission statement that clearly defined goals for the program: "To improve South Sacramento's health and safety through youth engagement, volunteering and advocacy." Their bright enthusiasm as they discussed what they had accomplished that evening made it clear that they will work hard to make this mission a reality — beginning with the food on their lunch tables, and onward to endless possibilities.

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Girls on the Rise gives young women like Jaelyn Singleton (seen here with program manager Shannon Read) the skills they need to make a difference in their community. Photo by Tara Patrick



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

A Chance to Shape School Funding

BY MEREDITH J. GRAHAM

Added school funding and changes in the way that money is handled mean communities have an unprecedented chance to make an impact on how state funds are spent. But until districts put protocols in place for community involvement, it's up to individuals and local groups to start discussing priorities.

The Local Control Funding Formula, also referred to as the Fair School Funding Law, went into effect in July 2013 and calls for \$18 billion in increased funding over the next eight years for students who come from low-income families, are English-language learners or are in foster care. It also requires that schools and parents work together with districts to determine where that money is spent.

"This is an opportunity for communities to be engaged," says Carl Pinkston, secretary of the Black Parallel School Board, which receives funding from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities grant. "What would they like their schools to look like?"

Pinkston is passionate about education, particularly for black students, many of whom are part of the Sacramento City School District. That district also has a large number of students — 74 percent — who fit into the categories targeted for increased founding, Pinkston is working to ensure that the additional money actually goes to help the kids it's designed to help.

"In the past, funding would come down to districts, and the district staff would develop the budget. Then the budget goes public and

everyone gets to respond," Pinkston explains. "Since this is our opportunity, we decided to do something different, to bring our partners together — folks who often sit on opposite sides of the table — to begin having a dialogue about what we want our budget to look like.

"THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNITIES TO BE ENGAGED. WHAT WOULD THEY LIKE THEIR SCHOOLS TO LOOK LIKE?"

Carl Pinkston, Black Parallel School Board secretary

"We are going to actually propose a budget for 2014-15 instead of trying to argue over what the district decides."

Pinkston says the Black Parallel School Board has come together with various unions, teachers, parents and representatives of other community organizations, including Latino and Hmong groups, to discuss priorities for education. The main goal is to ensure that the extra funding goes to help underprivileged children, rather than going into district reserves or being used for other purposes.

A provision of the new formula requires districts to work with parents and school leaders to determine how the money is spent. The template for how to go about that collaboration, however, won't be finished until after the 2014-15 budget is drawn up, so Pinkston's group decided to start engaging community groups now.

"We want to bring folks together before the budget comes out and begin to articulate to the district exactly what we want," he says. "Do we want more for professional development, or decreased class sizes? Where do we want these increased funds to go? Because they're supposed to be for low-income students."

For more information on how the Black Parallel School Board and other groups are responding to these changes and how to get involved, check the board's website at www.blackparallelschoolboard.com.

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Black Parallel School Board members Lailah Muwakkil, Carl Pinkston and Darryl White discuss funding priorities for low-income students. Photo by Tara Patrick



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